



REGIONAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT STATEMENTS

5 May 2004

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): The Labor government has talked at length about consulting the people, about listening to the people and about being a responsive and caring government. The Minister for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, when he was the Minister for Regional Development, announced that a regional impact assessment statement would be undertaken for significant government decisions. He announced that these statements would be 'publicly available to the community for consideration and input' by 'ensuring that South Australia's regional areas are given the profile they need and deserve in state government decision making and resource allocation determinations'.

The Seafood Council called one minister's regional statements laughable back in June 2003, so there must be some statements. The simple fact is that it is another example of the government's rhetoric: all bombast with less substance than fairy floss. I bring to the attention of the house a concerning example of where this government announces with fanfare how consultative it is but then does the opposite with the people who will be most adversely affected, those who live in the country.

When the former Minister for Transport announced the proposed road safety reforms, I wrote to him on 22 July 2002 (this letter has been acknowledged twice but not answered) and on 19 December 2003 (this letter has been acknowledged once but not answered), asking that regional impact assessment statements be undertaken prior to the implementation of the road safety reforms. It was amazing to me that the government was introducing a raft of tougher penalties as part of an overhaul of road safety laws but at the same time significantly reducing road funding in regional areas. I am sure that a regional impact assessment statement would have confirmed that more money spent on safer roads would have a greater impact on improving road safety and reducing the number of accidents than more restrictive laws.

In both letters I reminded the minister of his government's commitment to undertake regional impact assessment statements as part of the process prior to introducing legislation or regulations that particularly affected those living in rural and regional South Australia. However, the former minister announced the Road Safety Advisory Council's 25 recommendations for the second phase of road safety reform. He said that the council took into account interstate and overseas road safety experience, the work of various task forces and community input. I questioned the community input. Who asked regional people for input, particularly the young? The minister also advised that the council had identified another 13 key road safety issues that it will be investigating during the rest of this year.

In June 2003 the Minister for Industry, Trade and Regional Development advised that the government's objective is to ensure greater transparency of government administration in relation to the regions by undertaking regional impact assessment statements and that the government would publish the outcome of these consultations. He reassured the public of South Australia that this new model would ensure deliberations of cabinet and senior levels of government would be more attuned to the concerns and priorities of regional areas.

He said that this transparent consultation would improve government responsiveness and lift its capacity to take into account regional needs, not only when government decisions are made but also when proposals are at the initial stages of being framed.

Yet none of this was evident when changes were made to the road safety laws. Even the implementation of the

learner drivers' requirements was inequitable for country people and created considerable confusion. People on learners' permits under the old rules were not given sufficient notice of the changes, throwing into disorder their plans for employment and casual jobs during the school holidays. At the very least, a transition period should have been put in place. A number of young people and their parents protested the inequity of the new laws. Some politically aware young people from my electorate signed a petition requesting the minister to exempt them from having to wait the now required six months. They just wanted to be able to get on with their lives as planned.

Many of these country learner drivers do not have the advantage of having a Department of Transport officer or a qualified training person in their town, thus requiring them to make complicated arrangements to undertake driver training, sometimes necessitating a number of special round trips of up to 300 or more kilometres to fit in lessons and tests. This is at great expense and inconvenience to family members, who often have to take time off work to get the person wanting a licence to the nearest town with the facilities. Motor vehicles are often the only mode of transport available for accessing government departments, school, work, social and sporting functions. Country people do not have the luxury, in the majority of cases, of taxis, buses, trains or trams, so driving licences are a necessity, not a luxury. Travelling significant distances is a fact of life for the majority of people living in regional communities.

While parents are concerned about their children driving, they find that the quality of life for their children is lifted when they are able to drive themselves to sport practice, extra study periods at exam time in year 12, and to social functions. Inexperience and the novelty of driving are two major factors in reckless driving, something that a regional impact assessment statement surely would have identified. Education could be the key. Defensive driving courses would be more effective in combating the road toll, in particular, and road accidents in general. I certainly do not condone drink driving. However, penalising a first-time offender by disqualifying them from driving for long periods adds to the discrimination against those living in rural and regional South Australia.

This may result in higher unemployment, health problems associated with isolation and a lack of the means to socialise, and could well be significant in increasing our already high regional youth suicides and poor mental health. It is sobering to note that the government's much vaunted road safety reforms have not reduced the road toll. However, I wonder what the effect has been on our already high youth suicide rate in country areas. A regional impact assessment statement should have identified what advantages and possible disadvantages, if any, the reforms would have in these matters. I understand that changes implemented in Victoria have not reduced the incidence of drink driving, nor reduced accidents. Again, a regional impact assessment statement would have brought out this point.

The restrictive changes to road rules are impacting negatively on farming business and trucking companies. What are the implications of country young adults having to be provisional drivers until they are 20 years of age? Most young people assist at harvest time by driving headers, trucks or other farm equipment, and I am concerned about the effect that these initiatives will have on these activities. Will someone be 22 years of age before they can even apply for a heavy vehicle licence? Trucking companies are having trouble enlisting young people to become drivers without the impost of having to wait until a later age, by which time these young people will have found other career options, probably in the cities. These things would have been picked up in a regional impact assessment statement and perhaps adjustments made.

A driving instructor commented in *The Advertiser* of 9 February 2004 "I think they are already making it too hard to get a learner's permit and it's putting some kids out of the reach of getting their learner's"

Surely the aim should be to have drivers who are qualified, safe to themselves and other road users. Consideration should be given to how the unfair impacts of these laws can be reduced for our country kids and their families, before more restrictions are put in place. I ask that a regional impact assessment statement be undertaken to reduce the potential impact of the rules already in place, and of others that are being considered.

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4 June 2003

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): Will the Premier advise the house whether, in light of the new regional impact assessment statement guidelines, he envisages decisions, such as cuts to regional hospital budgets and services and changes in funding formulas, such as those that cover active club grants and sporting facilities grants, qualify for public consultation and a public regional impact assessment statement?

The Hon. M.D. RANN (Premier): Obviously, the honourable member is aware that what I am really looking for is synchronicity, but I will be happy to get a report for her.

REGIONAL IMPACT STATEMENTS

3 June 2003

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): Will the Minister for Industry, Trade and Regional Development supply copies of the 150 regional impact statements mentioned on ABC radio by the Minister for Tourism and advise the house whether they are all the decisions made in relation to the regions in the last year, as the minister stated on ABC radio? On 1 March 2003, on ABC radio the Minister for Tourism stated:

We have the opportunity to put in regional impact statements. We've had over 150 of those in the last year.

A number of decisions have been made by cabinet which I believe have not had regional impact statement assessments, such as the removal of the regional health inspectors, the regional ambulance communication centres, the Coffin Bay ponies and the Outback road workers. Many more decisions have become apparent **The Hon. R.J. McEWEN (Minister for Industry, Trade and Regional Development):** Mr Speaker, you will be delighted to know that, since I have had the privilege to join cabinet, I have been robust in demanding that the views of rural and regional South Australian are taken into consideration in every cabinet decision. In fact—

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order! The leader will come to order.

The Hon. R.J. McEWEN: The member for Flinders will be delighted that I take a robust stance on all issues involving rural and regional South Australia and that every cabinet decision must consider the impact on that area, whether the service can be directly applied to all regional South Australia or not. Does the member wish me to make public 160-odd cabinet documents?

Members interjecting:

The Hon. R.J. McEWEN: Before we need to call a doctor for the leader, can I reassure him that—

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Mawson and the Attorney-General will come to order.

The Hon. R.J. McEWEN: Mr Speaker, I know that you and I at least are aware how important it is that a rural and regional perspective be brought to every cabinet decision. So, I have gone beyond the original promise made at the last election and have now introduced, for significant cabinet decisions, a second tier of input—a regional impact assessment statement. We have gone beyond the original commitment and, in terms of the second tier, for significant cabinet decisions—

Members interjecting:

The Hon. R.J. McEWEN: I know that you at least, Mr Speaker, want to know the answer, because you wish to represent your community, as do I; others, of course, wish to interject, because they do not want to hear what is going on. However, their communities do. The commitment this government will give to those communities is that, in terms of significant cabinet decisions, the second tier (the regional impact assessment statements) will be made

public and will be available to the community as part of the decision-making process. Communities will be engaged. If the opposition is genuine—

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Unley will come to order. For the third and final time, the member for Wright will come to order.

The Hon. R.J. McEWEN: The key to regional impact assessment statements will be engaging the stakeholders in the process. That is the challenge that we will put to the communities by identifying the key agencies that wish to respond, and that can include local government and our partnerships with regional development boards. Equally, it can include any local member identifying key agencies that wish to contribute ahead of the decision-making process, so that, when we get around to making a decision, it is a quality decision that has engaged the whole community ahead of the event. Equally—

Members interjecting:

The Hon. R.J. McEWEN: The opposition does not want to be consulted, nor does it like to be consulted. Unfortunately, if you are part of the process, you have to respect the outcome and the decision. It is much easier to sit back and carp and not be responsible for the outcome of the decision.

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order!